

been a target of intimidation and harassment by the Philadelphia Police department. Jamal continues to fight for an a new trial, and his life.

The movement to free Mumia Abu-Jamal has been spearheaded by the International Concerned Family and Friends of Mumia Abu-Jamal, coordinated by MOVE member Pam Africa and has been growing by leaps and bounds in the last couple years. He is internationally known and supported. He also became celebrated internationally as a writer for his 1995 book *Live From Death Row*, which has been translated into over half a dozen languages. He has just published a second book titled *Death Blossoms: Reflections of a Prisoner of Conscience*.

Some other Black and New African political prisoners:

Sundjata Acoli describes himself as a New African and is a Black Liberation Army prisoner of war. He was imprisoned for his actions carried out in the fight for Black Liberation. He was a member of the Black Panther Party and later joined the Black Liberation Army because of police repression. A shootout occurred with police that left one cop dead, a BLA soldier dead and another wounded. He was captured and is serving a life sentence for the incident. He has been imprisoned for over 25 years.

Sekou Odinga is also a New African POW. In 1965 he joined Malcom X's Organisation for Afro-American Unity (OAAU), but after Malcom's death he left and went on to join the Black Panther Party. He helped build the Bronx BPP in New York City. An incident happened where he was wanted by the Police, and fearing for his life he went underground and joined the Black Liberation Army. He remained underground for 12 years involved in revolutionary clandestine activity for Black Liberation until his capture. Upon his capture in 1982 he was brutally tortured and has experienced long periods of solitary confinement and other psychological torture, like many others, designed to break his spirit and his beliefs. He is serving a life sentence.

The New York 3 were framed for the murder of two police officers in 1973 and are serving life sentences. They are **Herman Bell**, **Jalil Muntaqim**, and **Albert Nuh Washington**. All three were involved in the Black Panther Party, and later joined the Black Liberation Army. They have now served over twenty years in prison.

Ojore Nuru Lutalo is a New African POW. He was involved with the Black Liberation Army and other activities for Black Liberation and imprisoned in 1982. He was placed in the prison's "Control Unit" in 1986 where he has since been locked down alone 23 hours a day, not for punishment but because of his political beliefs and spirit. He is serving a 40 year sentence.

The MOVE 9 have been imprisoned since 1978, following the confrontation between the MOVE Organisation and Philadelphia city government and Police department. They are imprisoned for being MOVE members, and could be released tomorrow if they renounced membership in MOVE, which they refuse to do. The day after they were sentenced to 30-100 years each for the death of the one cop, Mumia Abu-Jamal on a live talk show asked the judge, who had just sentenced them, if he knew who killed the police officer. He replied, "I have no idea." The MOVE 9 are **Janine**, **Merle**, **Janet**, **Debbie**, **Delbert**, **William**, **Mike**, **Charlie**, and **Eddie Africa**. They remain strong and unbroken though they have served almost 20 years now.

There are many many other prisoners that have not been mentioned but are just as important. This is merely meant to be an introduction to the subject. The movement around Mumia Abu-Jamal has been very successful in educating about American political prisoners, and demanding their defense and release as a higher political priority of the left then it was previously. But most importantly the movement around Mumia has drawn a clear line that the US government had better be very careful in crossing. If they can take the life of Mumia in the face of his immense and growing support, then the future for the rest of the political prisoners will be very bleak, and for ourselves as well when we stand up for justice and against racism, poverty, and oppression. But if we can stop Mumia's execution and win his freedom, then he could be the first in line of yesterday's freedom fighters returning home. His life is not in the judge's or government's hands. His life is in the people's hands. What are we going to do about it?

the BLACK LIBERATION MOVEMENT & POLITICAL PRISONERS / PRISONERS OF WAR

In the United States there are currently over 150 documented political prisoners and prisoners of war. They come from various political struggles such as the Puerto Rican independence movement, American Indian movement and the white anti-imperialist movement. But the largest group of prisoners are from the Black Liberation movement of the late sixties to early eighties. Almost half of all political prisoners and prisoners of war are black, african-american, and New Africans who were imprisoned for their political beliefs and activities during this time period, several who have been imprisoned for over twenty five years. It is necessary to briefly look at the organisations that these prisoners were and are still a part of, to understand the context of their imprisonment. In no way does this article pretend to be comprehensive, but is rather a brief introduction to an important and often not known history.

The **BLACK PANTHER PARTY (BPP)** was founded in 1966 in Oakland, California by **Bobby Seale** and **Huey P. Newton**, and quickly became one of the most important militant black organisations in recent times. It came at a time when the non-violent civil-rights movement led by **Martin Luther King Jr.** was winding down as increasing numbers grew frustrated with its inability to win black freedom in America and as the violence of the police and racist mobs inflicted on blacks became more frequent and harsher. Also the US entered the Vietnam War and blacks were sent over in overwhelming disproportion, being used as cannon fodder with many returning home in body bags, or with physical and/or psychological problems.

The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, as it was first called, saw itself as the direct inheritors of the teachings of **Malcolm X**. They believed that black communities constituted a distinct oppressed nation and super-exploited internal colonies of the US. They also believed armed self-defense of the black community was a central ingredient in any attempt to secure black freedom and an inherent right of any oppressed people. They were the first and most successful organisation in this time period to develop armed self-defense as a coherent part of their political activity. This and their ten point programme helped them grow quickly into a large national organisation with chapters in most parts of the US within a couple years. At their height the Black Panther Newspaper had the largest circulation, and was the most widely read, of any black newspapers in the country at that time. Their 10 point program included such demands as an end to poverty and exploitation, housing, employment, education, liberation of black prisoners, an end to the police brutality of the black community, freedom, and black political power. They also demanded the exemption of blacks from military service which of course meant the Vietnam War.

It was in the growing opposition to the Vietnam War from all sectors of american society that the BPP was most successful in organising alliances with many other revolutionary organisations of the time, including Puerto Rican Independistas, Chicano (Mexican-American) nationalists, the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, and some segments of the white new left such as Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). Their popularizing of armed self-defense, their opposition to the war and rapid growth throughout the country were probably the factors that led **J. Edgar Hoover**, the head of the FBI to declare the Black Panther Party the "greatest threat to the internal security of the country." As a result the american government declared war on the BPP through the now famous COINTELPRO (counter-intelligence program), which led to countless arrests, frame-ups, imprisoning of party members, millions of dollars in bail, and over 30 party members murdered. But the attacks and eventual destruction of the BPP spawned another important organisation.

The **BLACK LIBERATION ARMY (BLA)** was an underground political-military organisation that arose out of the ashes of the Black Panther Party in the late sixties and early seventies with its main aim being black liberation by any means necessary. It was made up of the most militant and committed elements of the Black Panther Party, who survived the lethal and unrelentless repression of the party and its members. They found

themselves faced with the choice of being killed or going underground if they wanted to continue the struggle for black freedom which the civil rights movement had started and was left off at the Black Panther Party. They took most seriously the armed self-defense of the black community which the BPP popularized but had failed to sufficiently develop. They responded to the murderous state repression of the BPP and militarization of the rebellious black communities of the time with uncompromising self-defense, effectively striking police targets throughout the US. At the same time they worked to autonomously develop non-existing community services, such as free health clinics and food services in the ghettos by such means as appropriating banks and other financial institutions and redistributing the money into the seriously impoverished community. Eventually, the BLA faded out of existence when the above ground movement that sustained it was destroyed and the last fighters were captured by the mid-eighties.

The NEW AFRICAN INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENT (NAIM) grew around the same time as the Black Panther Party but believed that black liberation could be obtained by creating a separate black state known as the 'Republic of New Africa' (RNA) in 1968. The republic would be made up of five states in the southeastern US as that was the largest geographic concentration of blacks in the US. They also demanded reparations for the historic exploitation and abuse suffered by african-americans at the hands of their colonizers. A government was created and there were actual attempts at physically separating from the jurisdiction of the american system. They were most successful in developing a new revolutionary cultural identity among african-americans. They encouraged pride in african traditions, and many took african names and dress. People referred to themselves as New Africans to mark the change in this consciousness, even if they didn't share the goal of a separate state. The RNA also became severely targeted by the US government and many have been imprisoned as a result. It continues to function with some chapters but has diminished in size and in importance.

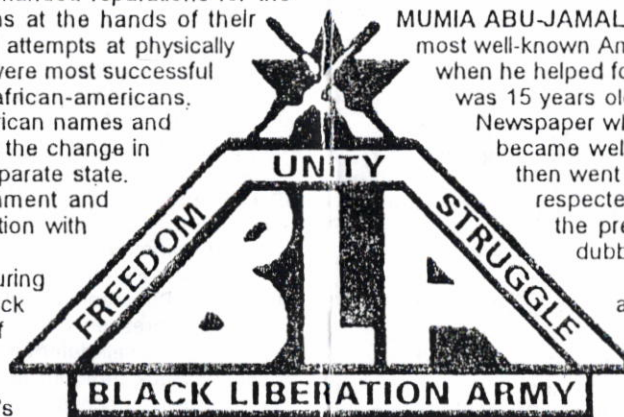
The MOVE ORGANISATION surfaced in Philadelphia during the early seventies. Members are characterized by their dreadlock hair, the adopted last name "Africa" (from the afrocentric belief that all human life originated in Africa), a principled unity, and an uncompromising commitment to their beliefs. They are a deeply ecological and spiritual organisation, and say "MOVE's work is to stop industry from poisoning the air, the water, the soil, and to put an end to the enslavement of life- people, animals, any form of life ... and to set the example of revolution for people to follow when they realize how they've been oppressed, repressed, duped, tricked by this system, this government and see the need to rid themselves of this cancerous system as MOVE does."

MOVE quickly attracted the attention of the Philadelphia Police who launched a campaign of brutality against them. This peaked in two instances. The first was in 1978. After years of beatings by police and the murder of two of their children by police, MOVE members staged a demonstration outside their home by carrying rifles and stated their intention to defend themselves from police attacks. The police laid siege to the entire block for a year, and eventually attacked the MOVE headquarters, which left one police officer dead. Virtually all known MOVE members in Philadelphia were then arrested and the Nine MOVE members in the headquarters during the police attack were imprisoned for the death of the one cop.

The second confrontation between MOVE and the Philadelphia police occurred in 1985. MOVE had increased its campaign for the release of its political prisoners but the city and police attempted to completely wipe them out by laying siege to their house a second time, and then dropped a bomb on the roof of the building setting it on fire. In the end, five MOVE adults and six children were massacred and over 60 houses burnt down with over 250 people left homeless. MOVE continue to exist and struggle and are a central force to the campaign to free death-row political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal.

It is clear that any movement of oppressed people for their liberation and self-determination from the white-supremist, neo-colonial, patriarchal and capitalist power structure is viewed as a threat and is severely repressed by state forces as soon as it starts

to form. Many political prisoners have received incredibly long sentences where in many cases no violence occurred and serve more time than those convicted of violent crimes such as murder or rape. Some political prisoners have been outright framed. Often political prisoners are selected for special treatment while imprisoned. They are often beaten and isolated from the rest of the prison population in "control units" to avoid contamination of the prison and the spread of revolutionary ideas. "Control Units" are usually cells the size of a large bathroom with no windows, where prisoners are locked in alone usually 23 hours a day under constant surveillance of their every movement by cameras. They are forced to undergo continual body cavity searches, which have been described as being repeatedly raped. Also, they are allowed very few visits from family members or supporters and all visits are completely no-contact. The effects of having no real human contact for extended periods can be very devastating. This punishment lasts for years often and its real purpose is to break the spirit and beliefs of political prisoners. It is often called behaviour modification and can sometimes include experiments with unknown drugs. Many prisoners break down psychologically after years of this torture and deteriorate mentally, socially, and physically. Some significant Black political prisoners are mentioned below.



MUMIA ABU-JAMAL has sat on death-row for the last 15 years, and is probably the most well-known American political prisoner in the world. His political activism started when he helped found the Philadelphia branch of the Black Panther Party when he was 15 years old. He soon after went to California to work on the Black Panther Newspaper which he credits for teaching him the journalism skills that he later became well-known for. After the destruction of the Black Panther Party he then went to work as a professional journalist. He became well-known and respected for his writings and radio commentaries, eventually becoming the president of the Philadelphia Association of Black Journalists and dubbed the "Voice of the Voiceless."

One of the voiceless he covered was the MOVE Organisation and the conflict between MOVE and the Philadelphia city government and Police department. He was the only journalist that accurately covered the siege of MOVE in 1978 and the trial of 9 MOVE members, each sentenced to 30-100 years for the death of a police officer killed in the bungled raid on MOVE headquarters. From the age of 15 when he joined the Panthers Jamal had been under continual surveillance by the FBI and city police but his work exposing the campaign against MOVE made him a target of the Police department, cost him his professional career, and is the prime motive that later put him in prison.

In 1981, Jamal was involved in an incident of which he still hasn't had the opportunity to tell his version of the story in a court room. Late one night while he was driving a cab he saw a police officer beating someone over the hood of a car. The person receiving the beaten turned out to be Jamal's brother. A shootout then happened and the police officer was killed, Jamal was almost fatally wounded, and Jamal's brother disappeared (he went into hiding fearing for his safety where he's been for the last 15 years, waiting to testify in a new trial for Jamal). The police then tried unsuccessfully to assassinate Jamal while hospitalized. He was then railroaded in a trial where his basic rights were taken away, where he wasn't even present in the court room for most of the trial and he didn't even testify in his own defense. The presiding judge, Albert Sabo was at one time a member of the city's police union the Fraternal Order of Police and pressed the jury for a death penalty conviction based on Jamal's political beliefs and his membership in the Black Panther Party when he was a teenager in the sixties.

The first trial has now been exposed as a total shame. Jamal's defense attorney was eventually disbarred for his incompetence, and most importantly one of the key witnesses against Jamal, a prostitute at the time named Veronika Jones has recently come forward and testified that police coerced her to testify that she saw Jamal shoot the cop by threatening her with imprisonment on outstanding criminal charges she had. She was ordered arrested on the stand this when testifying about her original forced perjury by the same "hanging judge" Sabo who refuses to relinquish his hold of Jamal's case, and has made it a personal vendetta that Jamal be executed. Since her testimony she too has